

NATIONAL

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CPYRGHT

## Behind a Ransoming

# *How Castro Aides Were Smuggled Into U.S. to Clinch Prisoner Trade*

Banner headlines on Christmas Eve 1962 told the dramatic story of the Cuban prisoner exchange. But important details about the deal are only now coming to light.

They start with the mysterious flight, on the night of Dec. 21, 1962, of a ghost-white twin-engine transport that bore no



At Port Everglades, Fla., a U.S. ship hurriedly loads ransom supplies.

markings. On the flight's success rested the freedom, perhaps the lives, of 1,113 courageous Cuban exiles.

The exiles, 20 months before, had tried to invade their homeland and to drive out Premier Fidel Castro and his Communist compatriots. Instead, they had been captured and placed behind barbed wire.

Castro was holding the exiles out as bait. With his economy faltering badly, he was willing to barter their lives for desperately needed goods. At first he wanted tractors; a group of prominent American citizens, led by Gen. Lucius Clay and Milton Eisenhower, had started to gather millions of dollars for this exchange. But the emotional, unpredictable Castro had raised his demands, seeking earth-moving equipment that could build military fortifications, and the deal fell through.

### Exchange Is Imperative

Now, another attempt was to be made. This time medicines were to be placed on the scales alongside the lives of the Cuban prisoners. And this time the exchange must take place; there might not be another chance.

After hard bargaining, New York lawyer James B. Donovan, who earlier had negotiated the release of U-2 pilot Gary Powers from the Russians, secured an agreement from Castro on the prisoners. The ransom was set at \$53,000,000 worth of drugs, and the prisoners would be released by Christmas if a \$12,000,000 first instalment were rushed to Havana before then.

Somehow, through round-the-clock efforts of volunteers, Government officials, the drug and transportation industries, and the American Red Cross, the first instalment of medicines was pledged, col-